Laura Poskin, Chief Aging Officer
Jewish Healthcare Foundation

Testimony for the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
"Connecting Pennsylvania's Seniors: Addressing Social Isolation and Loneliness"
October 29, 2026

Senator McCormick and honored guests, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Laura Poskin. I am a gerontologist and the Chief Aging Officer at Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF). The fact that we have a "Chief Aging Officer" underscores our Foundation's deep commitment to improving how we age. We work in southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond, promoting better health and stronger systems of care.

Thank you for holding this hearing here. Pittsburgh is a special place. For generations, we have grown and adapted with creativity, passion, and a little elbow grease. Our region has the second highest percentage of older adults in the country, second to Palm Beach, Florida, where life is a little different. We have an incredible network of national leaders in aging—leaders in industry, academia, health systems—and we have a long history of working together.

I like to think of southwestern Pennsylvania as the capital for aging in place. Or, "aging in community." That's the goal. Aging, not "in place" in our living rooms, but in the communities we call home, alongside the people we call neighbors and loved ones.

True, meaningful connection is the fabric of our communities, from here to my grandparents' home in Cambria County to across the Commonwealth—and we're all stronger for it. Stronger, meaning healthier. Stronger, meaning more prosperous. Stronger, meaning more resilient, as individuals and as communities. Social isolation (being alone) and loneliness (feeling alone) are dangerous and costly. They lead to an estimated $6.7 billion in additional Medicare spending annually.

Higher levels of social connectedness, though, are associated with better health, including survival after heart attacks, slower memory decline, even more resistance to the common cold. That's good for people and it's good for the bottom line, too.

Fostering social connection is clearly the answer, but how? I have two recommendations:

1. **Reauthorize the Older Americans Act**—as the Senate voted to do in July. Thank you. Now we need the House to pass it or we start over again in 2027. The Older Americans Act funds essential programs, meals, transportation and caregiver support that keep people healthy and engaged. At JHF, we supplement these public dollars by supporting partners like the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, a nationally recognized senior center. Together, we've advanced innovations like the Virtual Senior Academy, an online platform for interactive classes, and Memory Cafés, sessions that engage people with dementia and their care partners. We're now expanding these to libraries.

2. **Invest in new models here in Pittsburgh**. It's time to build on our region's global leadership in tech, robotics, and health research, and recognize the opportunity in aging. Age-tech—breakthroughs in health, mobility, home design, and social connection—is projected to reach $120 billion by 2030. At JHF, we've funded a planning and design phase for a Longevity Hub—a tech-forward "one-stop shop" where folks can see their doctor, take a class, volunteer, even re-work their resume, all in one trip. JHF has a track record of testing innovative models and scaling what works through public-private partnerships. Our region is poised for demonstrations like the Longevity Hub and new, community-centered housing models, leveraging braided funding and partnership. Coinvest with us.

Of course we need technology to supplement, not replace our relationships. I'm a gerontologist today, at 43, because of a powerful volunteer experience I had in my 20s. I visited a retired professor named Arthur, in his 80s, once a week. He lived on his own, with the help of an aide. His wife had passed years before. We talked. We laughed. We both left those visits changed, stronger in each other's company.

While isolation and loneliness impact older adults, they certainly impact people of all ages. We have a real opportunity to reimagine what's possible in later life and across our lifetimes. Let's make it happen here in Pittsburgh.